

Snowe, Collins & Michaud Work with USDA for Approval of Cattle Shipment from Eastport

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Seek long-term certification of the Port of Eastport as a livestock exportation facility

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, U.S. Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins along with Congressman Mike Michaud announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has approved a shipment of 500 cattle from Eastport, Maine. A Texas-based company's request to utilize Eastport, Maine as a special port of embarkation for 500 dairy heifers to Turkey had been in limbo due to bureaucratic challenges relating to port and livestock inspections.

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The country of Turkey is interested in buying approximately 8,000 dairy heifers from the United States. Over the last 18 months, dairy farmers across the country have operated at a loss and many have lost their farms and animals due to current economic conditions. This initial shipment of 500 includes cattle from over 30 small dairies from Maine, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Turkey's regulations require that animals be exported only from "bluetongue disease free" states like Maine. At this time, however, the only approved port meeting these requirements is Wilmington, Delaware. According to APHIS, the federal agency responsible for certifying ports and inspecting livestock for exportation to ensure animal welfare, arranging the logistics for inspecting a new port usually takes several weeks. However, given the exporter's need to ship the cattle by July 18, the delegation worked closely with USDA to send additional APHIS staff to Maine to ensure the port, inspection facility, containers, and vessel are inspected appropriately. If USDA-APHIS identifies any problems during the inspections, they will have to reassess the situation.

In addition to helping with this initial shipment, the congressional delegation has successfully urged APHIS to initiate the process for long-term certification of the Port of Eastport as a livestock exportation facility.

"We appreciate USDA working with us to help the exporter and the Eastport Port Authority expedite the exportation process for this shipment," said the delegation. "At a time when the dairy industry has been in crisis, the exportation of dairy heifers provides them with important economic support. Maine and other states can take advantage of a tremendous export opportunity to Turkey, but this market is limited because of the very specific export regulations to Turkey. Opening the Port of Eastport for the exportation of cattle would be very beneficial to Washington County, and we are hopeful that additional shipments can help more of our dairy farmers in the future."

When the Texas-based exporter ran into logistical issues with the APHIS certification process, Chris Gardner, the Executive Director of the Eastport Port Authority, suggested that the company contact the congressional delegation for assistance.

“Everyone at the Port of Eastport is extremely thankful to the federal delegation for their assistance in this matter. When the issue came to light we knew instinctively that our delegation could, and most importantly would, help as they have on many occasions in the past. From our local Senator Kevin Raye all the way to the federal delegation, everyone was very responsive. Within thirty-six hours of reaching out to them we had resolution and it is without a doubt that without their help, these permitting issues would not have been able to be overcome,” said Gardner.

“This could be a tremendous opportunity for not only the Port of Eastport and Washington County, but for the entire state,” Gardner continued. “It has the potential to be a new industry here in Maine that centers on some of our oldest industries like farming and shipping. We remain focused on building upon the success of this initial shipment and anticipate more in the foreseeable future.”

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